

Francis Macy House  
77 Main Street  
Nantucket  
Nantucket County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-931

HABS  
MASS  
10-NANT  
50-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

## FRANCIS MACY HOUSE

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MASS  
10-NANT  
50-

Location: 77 Main Street (on north side of Main Street,  
corner of Walnut Lane), Nantucket, Massachusetts.

Present Owner: Christel T. Mitchell (Mrs. Leeds Mitchell)

Present Occupant: Mrs. Mitchell

Present Use: Seasonal occupancy.

Brief Statement  
of Significance: One of about a dozen mansions built at the height  
of whaling prosperity; late eighteenth century  
house in rear.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1790 -- Land and homestead of Francis Macy. He died in 1817, leaving property to his widow and five children.
- 1822 -- John B. Macy. A Deed of Division of property of Francis Macy gave the fifth parcel, "house and land on Main Street corner of a Lane" to his son John B. Macy.
- 1826 -- Property was attached and taken by Nantucket Pacific Bank.
- 1827 -- Robert Coggeshall bought from Bank.
- 1830 -- Charles Mitchell purchased property, it having been again taken by the Bank and deeded to James N. Bassett in the meantime.
- 1853 -- George Myrick bought from the Estate of Charles Mitchell.
- 1854 -- John H. Shaw bought for \$5,000.
- 1860 -- Eliza Ann Shaw, wife of John H. Shaw. John H. Shaw had conveyed the property to Sarah H. Swain who in turn conveyed it to his wife.
- 1869 -- George H. Sargent purchased property from Eliza Ann Shaw.

- 1888 -- Sarah B. Chadwick, wife of William H. Chadwick.
- 1894 -- Elizabeth W. Webb. She died in 1908, leaving property by will to Charles Webb and Elizabeth H. Webb.
- 1909 -- J. Sidney Mitchell purchased.
- 1938 -- Helen Mitchell Todd inherited from her brother.
- 1946 -- Leeds Mitchell and Christel T. Mitchell. Property was deeded to them by Leeds Mitchell's sister, Helen Mitchell Todd.
- 1951 -- to date -- Christel T. Mitchell, widow of Leeds Mitchell.

(Abstract, Records in Registry of Deeds, Nantucket)

2. Date of erection: House is of two ages: 1790 and 1836. (Abstract, Records in Registry of Deeds, Nantucket, Mass., and "Main Street", a publication of the Nantucket Historical Association).
3. Architect: Unknown
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Little is known of this house except for the fact that the ell was the original house built on Main Street prior to 1790. When purchased by Charles Mitchell, who was in 1836 a man of considerable means, the old house was moved to the rear of the lot where a candle house had formerly stood, and was used as the ell to the large mansion, the present house, that he erected on the site.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: Around 1854, John H. Shaw, who had been a leading merchant in the whaling business, added a very lovely Ionic portico to the front stoop and gave the house a great deal of elegance.

Due to unfortunate circumstances the house fell into disrepair for several years until around 1900 when it was put back into good condition, as it has continued to be to date.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: The vicissitudes of the whaling industry are evidenced by four leading merchants and candle-makers who owned this house only to lose it through insolvency. The ill-fated ownership was broken by Charles H. Webb, a writer whose pen name was John Paul, and who was an associate of Bret Harte and Mark Twain, both of whom stayed in this house when they visited Nantucket. Mr. Webb wrote for the New York Tribune. He shared many experiences with Harte and Twain in California, which are

related in Roughing It.

Charles Mitchell was a prosperous whaling merchant when he first owned the property and Nantucket was at the height of its prosperity, being at that time superior to New Bedford in population and amount of business. The house was then one of the largest on the Island. From the walk on the roof one could see Cape Cod.

During the ownership of the Shaw family, the house was visited by President James A. Garfield.

In 1909 the property was purchased by Dr. J. Sidney Mitchell, who was born in Nantucket and had lived for many years in Chicago. He was known by the medical profession throughout the country, particularly for his articles in magazines and scientific journals. He became in 1894 the first President of the Nantucket Historical Association. His widow was very generous with the lovely home, opening it for many charitable and social gatherings. This custom has been continued by the present owner and musical and theatrical groups still enjoy the hospitality of the gracious house.

C. Sources of Information:

Old Views: Photograph in Ninety-Five Percent Perfect  
by Everett U. Crosby, Tetaukimmo Press, Nantucket, 1953.

(Note: No old photographs have been found.)

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin  
Nantucket, Massachusetts  
June, 1966

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. They are part of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.